

## Aaron Kramer

### Poet Description:

Among progressive modern American poets working with social and political themes and using traditional forms, Aaron Kramer may well be the single most accomplished figure. From his first protest poems, written in the mid-1930s when he was barely a teenager, through to his pointed critiques of the 1983 war in Grenada and Ronald Reagan's 1985 visit to Nazi graves in Bitburg, what stands out about Kramer's work is the musical character of his acts of political witness. Rhyme, meter, and traditional stanzaic forms in Kramer's poetry contain and direct anger, satire, and anguish about a century of singular violence. He wanted to radicalize root and branch of our literary tradition, not to abandon it for alternative forms.

The poems deploying these techniques in time would cluster around recurring themes and historical events. His first poems about exploited labor appeared in 1934; his last was published in 1995. His earliest poems about the suppression of freedoms in the United States date from 1938 and he continued writing them through the 1980s. Along with Edwin Rolfe, he is one of perhaps only two American writers to produce a series of poems about McCarthyism. Over four decades he would repeatedly write poems about the Holocaust. Like a number of American poets who came of age in the 1930s, he wrote poems about the Spanish Civil War through much of his life. And, finally, he had a continuing interest in and commitment to testifying about African American history.

It is this last subject that occasioned what is perhaps his masterpiece?the 26 poems comprising the 1952 sequence "Denmark Vesey," about plans for an aborted 1822 slave revolt in Charleston, South Carolina. It is probably the single most ambitious and inventive poem about race ever written by a white American, and it is distinguished in part by Kramer's skill at negotiating the political relationship between form, sound, diction and meaning. It is a call to African Americans, but also a general rallying cry issued in the midst of McCarthyism. "Denmark Vesey" was issued in a small, privately published chapbook. It remained unavailable thereafter until Kramer's *Wicked Times: Selected Poems* (2004) was published. Kramer was born in Brooklyn, NY. He taught at Dowling College on Long Island for over thirty years.

### Race/Ethnicity:

European <sup>[1]</sup>

### Picture:



**Gender:**

[Male](#) [2]

**Sexuality:**

[Straight](#) [3]

**First Name:**

Aaron

**Last Name:**

Kramer

**Birth & Death Dates:**

Tuesday, December 13, 1921 to Monday, April 7, 1997

**School of Poetry:**

[Modernist](#) [4]

**Birth Place:**

Brooklyn , New York

United States

See map: [Google Maps](#) [5]

New York US

**Group visibility:**

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[3] <http://www.modernamericanpoetry.org/category/sexuality/straight>

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